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Ellen Myers

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Meg Miner

Illinois Wesleyan University, mminer@iwu.edu

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Portrait of a Collector Interview with Ellen Myers

Transcribed by Kate Browne

BEGIN TRANSCRIPT

Meg Miner: Today is March 12th 2016 and this is Meg Miner. I am the archivist at Illinois Wesleyan University. And I have the joy of being on sabbatical. And I'm conducting a sabbatical project on former President Minor Myers and his collecting interests, his influences on our campus and in our community. And I've got the greater privilege today of being in Mystic, Connecticut with Ellen Myers and we're in your home in Bishop's Cove. Please introduce yourself and we'll just start having a conversation. Wherever you want to dive in. We can—let's, let me make it a little less intimidating than that. Tell me your name and where you were born and where you grew up. Let's start with that.

Ellen Myers: I'm Ellen Myers. I married Minor Myers, Junior in, um...I forgot the year I was married.

Miner: Was it 1968?

Myers: No.

Miner: No. Where—you were in Connecticut College, right?

Myers: Yep.

Miner: When did you graduate Connecticut College?

Myers: 1979.

Miner: Okay.

Myers: And we got married in '80. 19...yeah.

Miner: Okay. So you were a student at Connecticut College, then, when Minor was teaching right?

Myers: Right.

Miner: Because he taught there in—how'd you guys meet?

Myers: We met because there was a mutual attraction. And we invited...I was dating a fellow at the time and we invited Minor to come out and get a pizza at Angie's Pizza with us. And with...Minor and I just kept the whole conversation going. And the fellow that I came with who was my date for the evening, we lost track of each other halfway through the mozzarella.

Miner: I think I saw that in a movie once. Where the friend of a friend went off with the girl. Oh, how fun. So what did you guys get talking about?

Myers: I don't remember.

Miner: Some—just some mutual interest.

Myers: Well, he had a lot more interests than I.

Miner: Well, yeah.

Myers: But there was a physical attraction.

Miner: Great. So you had a spark. On your very first meeting.

Myers: Yes.

Miner: Love at first sight kinda spark?

Myers: Maybe.

Miner: Yeah?

Myers: Maybe.

Miner: So that would have been how long before you graduated?

Myers: After I graduated.

Miner: Oh after you graduated? Okay, sorry.

Myers: It would have been after I graduated. I graduated in '69?

Miner: '69? '79?

Myers: No, I'm not that young. Graduated in '69. '65 from boarding school.

Miner: Okay.

Myers: '69 from college.

Miner: And so you were married—

Myers: Shortly thereafter. And then about 7 or 8 years later, then came Minor the Third. And then we had another son named Geoffrey. And I started my teaching career in the Groton public schools. You passed through Groton.

Miner: Mm hmm.

Myers: Meg, when you came here. It's the submarine capital of the world. It's true.

Miner: Yeah.

Myers: You don't sound impressed.

Miner: Well, I saw signs out so I'm not shocked. I saw signs up when I came through that say they're having their centennial. In Groton. There's some sort of Navy centennial. Great storytelling, right? In the library it said something about share your stories about submarines. But I would not have known that before I came here. Does that factor into your history?

Myers: No.

Miner: So, a fun fact. But it's a fun fact though about Groton. 'Cause who would've thought?

Myers: Well, the fella I went to have pizza with, he was an ensign. Is that what they call?

Miner: Yeah, so a uniform thing.

Myers: Yeah.

Miner: Navy guy in the '60s.

Myers: Yep.

Miner: Fun.

Myers: Glad it's behind me.

Miner: Yeah. We all gotta come from somewhere.

Myers: Right.

Miner: But did you grow up in the area?

Myers: I grew up in Worcester County, Massachusetts. I went away to school for four years. And I graduated and went on to Connecticut College.

Miner: Okay. Why Connecticut College?

Myers: Because they accepted me.

Miner: That's a good reason.

Myers: I applied to Smith. That was my first choice. And they didn't accept me. And one of the schools I applied to—Wheaton. They accepted me. But Connecticut College had more cache.

Miner: And you were—I'm sorry, I'm terrible at geography. But you had already been away from home so maybe it wasn't traumatic you going to college away from home.

Myers: It was traumatic.

Miner: Was it? Okay.

Myers: My parents left on a trip to go around the world. I could've killed 'em for leaving me.

Miner: Was that when you were in boarding school or you'd gone off to college?

Myers: When I went off to college.

Miner: Oh dear. I'm sorry.

Myers: So it took its toll.

Miner: Yeah. You have a lot of maybe friends at Connecticut or people to hang out with.

Myers: Yeah. They're all dead too.

Miner: Oh dear. You are made of stern stuff. The other way to look at it.

Myers: Yeah. Yeah.

Miner: Well, what was your major?

Myers: French.

Miner: Okay so when you're teaching in Groton in the public schools, is that what you're teaching?

Myers: Yes.

Miner: Oh perfect. That's great.

Myers: Yep.

Miner: Language programs in K-12?

Myers: No.

Miner: Or which Groton school are you teaching in?

Myers: Repeat?

Miner: Which Groton school were you teaching in?

Myers: Cutler Middle school.

Miner: A language program in middle school.

Myers: Yes.

Miner: that's wonderful. So in Connecticut then you got a French degree. Did you also do a teaching track too?

Myers: That came along.

Miner: How did that happen?

Myers: If you wanted to continue to teach there, you had to get another degree. So I did a Master of Arts in Teaching.

Miner: Oh, okay. I'm ignorant of these things other than what I see at Illinois Wesleyan which has an elementary education and secondary education program too so I didn't know if Connecticut had that as well. So a Master's in Teaching and a Bachelor's in French. And then what?

Myers: Then, um, I just was very lucky in picking up jobs wherever Minor and I went. We got to—I had the job in Groton for the first 18 years. Then we moved to Geneva, New York and I had a nice little part time job. Um.

Miner: Teaching also?

Myers: Teaching French.

Miner: Okay.

Myers: Where did we go after?

Miner: After Geneva?

Myers: Yeah.

Miner: Was Illinois Wesleyan.

Myers: Okay.

Miner: Mm hm.

Myers: . And I had a job at Illinois State.

Miner: At the Metcalf school. That's the—what do you call it? A magnet school associated with the University. A model school, that's what it is.

Myers: I'm trying to think. Um. I can almost think of it. It'll come to me.

Miner: Sure. So that's a lot of moving around and disruption in your career.

Myers: Mm hmm. I liked it.

Miner: Did you?

Myers: A little variety.

Miner: A little variety?

Myers: I had my own money. I made the money. It was mine to keep.

Miner: Yeah. Autonomy is a really valuable thing.

Myers: Yes.

Miner: And where Minor the Third and Geoffrey going to school then at Metcalf as well? Did you teach them?

Myers: Yes.

Miner: That would be kinda weird.

Myers: And it was kinda weird.

Miner: It would be. I had a friend whose mother was her teacher for physical education and it was weird. It was weird for me to go visit here because it was here I'm going to my teacher's house. But we get over those things.

Myers: Yeah.

Miner: So what was it like—

Myers: You're very good at this, by the way.

Miner: Oh. We're having a conversation, right?

Myers: Right.

Miner: I'm curious. I'm just intensely curious about people and where they're at.

Myers: No wonder you have a nice job at IWU.

Miner: I'm very fortunate.

Myers: It takes somebody with the skill you have.

Miner: Thank you.

Myers: You're welcome.

Miner: I like meeting interesting people. And I don't know if this is technically in my in my job description, but I love telling stories about Illinois Wesleyan to people. Sidebar here. But most of the stories I get to tell people are about the 1900s. because we don't have a lot—people were so good at writing things down and printing things up and sharing information in earlier times. They were much better than we are today. And that's where my interest in creating oral histories is. Is finding voices of the people who were these and can tell us about what it was like.

But I think some of the themes you're talking about in women's history too, right? We were talking early about my military background and I worked in a job where I worked with men mostly because it was a mechanic's job. But I got to know their wives and it always struck me that nobody talked to them. It was them who had to keep everything in their homes going, right?

Myers: Yep.

Miner: And the kids taken care of and packing and moving and resettling and finding jobs because nobody ever get paid enough to support a family. So I think, you know, probably those interests started for me pretty early. Or at least my exposure to the way that moves—frequent moves affect people. But you guys were in Connecticut for a really long time. You were there 'til '82, right?

Myers: Yes.

Miner: So you had—let's see. I'm terrible at math—so you had about a decade of marriage—

Myers: I don't know either.

Miner: You got married after you graduated so that would have been around '70—

Myers: 1970.

Miner: Yeah, so—

Myers: Spring. The first day of spring.

Miner: Yeah. So as a young couple that must have been kinda good though. 'cause you had some stability early on, right? You had a circle of friends in Connecticut.

Myers: That's what I came back for.

Miner: Oh, those people you met then?

Myers: Right.

Miner: Oh, interesting.

Myers: Right.

Miner: Wow. And was it easier to see your family then too? You had children and—

Myers: Yeah.

Miner: They did the doting grandparent thing or were they—?

Myers: Yep.

Miner: Okay.

Myers: And it was tense at some times. They, you know, would just pull up the car and get out and they were there.

Miner: Host us for a weekend. Did they expect to stay?

Myers: No.

Miner: Oh, okay. At least you were spared that.

Myers: Yeah. Yeah.

Miner: So when you were teaching then, did the entire time that, um, you were in Connecticut you were in the Groton, the Groton public school system.

Myers: Yes.

Miner: Great. Did you live near campus?

Myers: You only needed on car so Minor could walk up.

Miner: Okay.

Myers: Did you see Connecticut?

Miner: I didn't make it over there yet. Perhaps I will this afternoon.

Myers: Yeah. I'm trying to think who you should talk to. They're all dead.

Miner: So what else were you involved with in campus live in Connecticut? Because Minor would have been—I'm thinking of the tenure track. I spoke with Brian Rogers about Minor's involvement with the library at the college. And were there, I don't know, events you went to. Some of the concerts? Was it that kind of college that had a lot of events going on in the evenings?

Myers: Yeah. Yeah.

Miner: So that was part of your life too?

Myers: Yes.

Miner: Did the boys get involved with that too?

Myers: Basketball.

Miner: Great. I told the basketball coach if he wanted to make extra money on the side, he'd have to invent a way—what they call it like this when they bounce the ball?

Miner: Dribbling.

Myers: Yes. He'd have to, um, find a silent dribble.

Miner: That'd be every parent's dream come true.

Miner: So they did a lot of practicing in your home, I take it.

Myers: Or outside. Or...

Miner: How far apart are they in age?

Myers: A little more than without years.

Miner: You had your hands full.

Myers: Yep.

Miner: That's a full time job.

Myers: But a good one. And a rewarding one.

Miner: Yeah. Good.

Myers: So. Trying to think of what else would be interesting.

Miner: Would you want to talk a little bit about collecting at this point in your lives?

Myers: Sure.

Miner: Were you already collecting this kind of furniture and decorative arts? How would you describe yourself as a collector.

Myers: Savvy.

Miner: For what in particular? Or anything that strikes your eye?

Myers: No. It's got to have panache.

Miner: So what in this room is something that you would you say with a savvy eye has panache the first time you saw it?

Myers: Well, we have a lot of pieces of Imari.

Miner: Did you do a lot of collecting in this area?

Myers: No.

Miner: Is it all Gridley's?

Myers: Some of it. We bought a lot of stuff. A lot.

Miner: From Gridley's? Well, where did you first see something like this then that struck you as something you'd like to have.

Myers: I suppose it would have been that Minor said, oh, that is absolutely fabulous. We've got have one of those.

Miner: So I am clueless on Imari. Tell me where it's—what part of the world does it come from?

Myers: Japan.

Miner: Okay. I see some Asian elements in it but it doesn't strike me as what I would think of as—I don't know.

Myers: High class Japan.

Miner: Okay.

Myers: When you think made in Japan.

Miner: There's so many reds and yellows and blues and—

Myers: Cinnamon.

Miner: —and nature. Well, it's more nature. The geometric elements are more about the layout of the natural elements, wouldn't you say?

Myers: Maybe.

Miner: Why would something like that be good to have?

Myers: Well, there was a time when I thought would stuff like that or jewelry—where were we?

Miner: Well, so you said that Minor perhaps was the—

Myers: Catalyst.

Miner: —instigator in this. So was it when you were in Connecticut that you started acquiring these kinds of things?

Myers: No. Connecticut we were focused big on furniture.

Miner: Perfect place for it. Because? Let's say it for the recording. Your interest in furniture is which period and what part of the world?

Myers: 17th century.

Miner: American?

Myers: American.

Miner: Which makes Connecticut a pretty darn good place to look for that kind of thing.

Myers: Yep.

Miner: Okay.

Myers: Yep. What else do you want to know?

Miner: Well, all I know about Minor as a collector—and I know nothing about you as a collector other than that people have told me that you're interested in furniture. All I know about Minor as a collector is what he said in published interviews. And the four published interviews I've read all he ever mentions was 18th century anything.

Myers: That's true.

Miner: Anything from the 18th century. So are these Imari plates from the 18th century?

Myers: Yep.

Miner: Okay. That's wonderful to hear because I know that he had an interesting—interest in 18th century American—

Myers: Also Canton.

Miner: You're pointing behind me at what?

Myers: Yeah, that's not a good. I can show you some other things.

Miner: Which one in particular are you looking at?

Myers: It's not Canton.

Miner: Okay.

Myers: I'm not saying it right.

Miner: Okay, well, we'll talk about that later. So the time period was important, then?

Myers: Yes.

Miner: Do you have a sense of why?

Myers: No.

Miner: So you weren't collecting though before you met him?

Myers: Right. I told him I could be Danish modern for all—

Miner: What did he think about that? If you insist or no way? Well. So with all the 18th century to choose from, um, I have heard people say decorative arts which obviously we see. Coins. Stamps. Is that true?

Myers: Yeah, I forgot that. Signatures. When he was at Princeton. And I don't know how many people know this.

Miner: Tell me.

Myers: He put on the mantle of the person in charge of getting well known people to come to Princeton to give a lecture. And one of the reasons he did that was so he could get their autographs.

Miner: Oh my goodness. Like who? Do you recall any names?

Myers: No, but I can recall one.

Miner: What's that?

Myers: When He—Sir Edward Heath.

Miner: So he went to Princeton too? 'cause he came to Wesleyan too.

Myers: No, he came to Wesleyan because of Minor.

Miner: Somebody made a joke that he was collecting Prime Ministers. But I didn't put it together that it was for the autographs.

Myers: Yes.

Miner: That's interesting. That's very interesting.

Myers: They've got to be around somewhere. I don't know. When I left, without going into detail, I couldn't get out of there fast enough.

Miner: You mean after he died?

Myers: Yeah.

Miner: Okay.

Myers: And so a lot of the stuff got mixed and matched and, you know, didn't come out exactly as it should of.

Miner: In what way?

Myers: It was all just mixed up.

Miner: You mean his collection and your packing?

Myers: The packing and the collections. I don't know how many books he had. But it was a tremendous number.

Miner: I saw over eleven thousand items.

Myers: I would say closer to twenty thousand.

Miner: Oh dear me.

Myers: And he was just happy as a clam with every purchase.

Miner: Why? What do you think did that?

Myers: I don't know. But he was really off the wall.

Miner: In acquiring things?

Myers: Mm hm. And I grew up in a family that praised saving money.

Miner: Oh dear.

Myers: Big time. So that caused some problems in the marriage. But he always managed to put bread on the table.

Miner: So some of his purchases put your family at risk.

Myers: That's too strong.

Miner: Okay.

Myers: We were—I can see why you said that, but it wasn't that bad.

Miner: Okay.

Myers: Mm mm.

Miner: Must have been very hard on your parents. Did you have—

Myers: He just knew when not to talk.

Miner: To you, you mean?

Myers: No, he would share things with me. But he didn't go over what he had bought from—from, um, my father would not have appreciated knowing about that.

Miner: So they didn't visit you very much in—

Myers: Yeah, they did. As I say, they just dropped in when the spirit moved them.

Miner: Even in Illinois?

Myers: They came for my—I have a picture over there—my father and Minor’s father in the middle and Minor. And that was his inauguration. So what else do you want to know?

Miner: Did you enjoy the inauguration? I see pictures of you guys in a horse-drawn carriage.

Myers: Yes.

Miner: You enjoyed that?

Myers: Yes.

Miner: That’s great. Why do you think he wanted to be president of a university?

Myers: That was what he always wanted to do.

Miner: Yeah? Since you knew him in Connecticut? He had that ambition?

Myers: Yep.

Miner: Do you know when that started? Because his father was a lawyer.

Myers: Yes.

Miner: Were other people in his family in academia?

Myers: No, they all went to college. By that, I mean they all—Minor’s siblings—but he always wanted to be university president. And it happened. And do you know it’s quite difficult to get a job being a university professor. I wanted to say there are 3,000 university presidents about how many people want the job.

Miner: Right. Was Wesleyan his first attempt at being in a pool?

Myers: No.

Miner: Okay.

Myers: And there were 170 who were in the pool and they chose him.

Miner: Oh wow. That’s a pretty big pool. Were the other places that he’d been interested in Wesleyan-like? I mean, small liberal arts places or were they all over the board? I’m just trying to see if was it the type of president or just to be a college president anywhere that was interesting to him?

Myers: I think he brought out the best in Illinois Wesleyan. I don’t think that Illinois Wesleyan had the panache—

Miner: Mm hmm.

Myers: —to use the word again—before Minor appeared on the scene. And he could just put all his imaginations to work and come up with something—I mean, how many people can write the Prime Minister of England and have him come over? Did you know he carries a red box?

Miner: No, I didn't know that.

Myers: Well, now you know.

Miner: What was in it?

Myers: Important papers.

Miner: Code kinds of things?

Myers: I don't know.

Miner: Oh my gosh. How on earth would that have happened?

Myers: Minor met him somewhere and that was that.

Miner: It sounds like he was a charmer.

Myers: I don't know which one was more of a charmer. I didn't think too much of Heath.

Miner: I meant Minor.

Myers: Yes. Yes.

Miner: So when you met, was he already collecting things? Did he already have his eye out for things?

Myers: Yes.

Miner: Did he already have porcelain?

Myers: No.

Miner: Okay.

Myers: No.

Miner: What kind of collections did he have originally?

Myers: Spoons.

Miner: Oh, okay. So the silver collecting?

Myers: The silver collecting.

Miner: Yeah. What on earth was it about—you don't see a spoon and say panache. At least I don't. maybe I'm looking at the wrong kinds of spoons. I don't know.

Myers: Well, I'll show you some.

Miner: Maybe I'll change my mind.

Myers: We won't hobble around too long. Because my knee cap bothers me.

Miner: We can stay right here. Don't have to go anywhere. So he was collecting spoons and I imagine books as well at that point in his life.

Myers: Yep.

Miner: So you started to keep an eye out for things. Was that because you'd shop or go on a trip or something?

Myers: Mm hm..

Miner: Was it fun?

Myers: You won't find a crab in me.

Miner: Not looking for one?

Myers: No.

Miner: I'm just imaging. I'm trying to put myself in your—

Myers: Position.

Miner: —situation. Where you're, you know, new to the—your parents went to college as well?

Myers: Mm hmm.

Miner: But you're new to a residential exposure, if you will, to the academic world.

Myers: Mm hmm.

Miner: You lived near campus. So papers graded early in the morning. You know, you've got your long weekend with two young boys ahead. And how does going antiquing fit into a weekend for a young couple with rambunctious young boys? I don't know.

Myers: Our boys weren't born.

Miner: Oh, okay. You said seven years?

Myers: Six years.

Miner: So you had time to start developing that side of your relationship.

Myers: Right.

Miner: Fun. What was the first that that you started thinking about as a collecting interest outside of Minor? For yourself? Is there a way to say that?

Myers: I probably never would have. Um. We had stuff coming into the house from the moment we got married practically. I'm looking at that pointing of Venice. And that belonged to Minor's grandmother. It's got a date on it. 1908.

Miner: Hm. Something that she'd acquired in Venice?

Myers: No, but somebody did.

Miner: So gradually his interests started to permeate your world is a way to say it.

Myers: Mm hmm.

Miner: I would imagine it was a way to share a joy in doing something unusual. Because I don't think—were a lot of people in your social circles doing that kind of thing?

Myers: No, but our social circles were way below the age of some of our dear friends.

Miner: Mm hm.

Myers: They were in their sixties. 65. Which sounds old, older.

Miner: Yeah. Were they faculty in the college?

Myers: Some were. I'm thinking of one in particular. She wasn't. She was just very well off. She gave us that rug.

Miner: It's beautiful. This one too. Were they playing—do you play any instruments?

Myers: No.

Miner: Was Minor playing at this point in his life?

Myers: Yes.

Miner: So you'd meet people probably through that kind of thing too.

Myers: Yes.

Miner: Very salon kind of thing, right? Surrounding yourself with people of wide-ranging interests and conversations. Lots of house parties?

Myers: Yeah.

Miner: I mean, this is, like, quintessential academic world.

Myers: Yep.

Miner: So you were living the dream?

Myers: Yep. Well put. Did the Wilsons have a lot of affairs at their house?

Miner: Well, certainly, I mean all the ones you have to have when you're the president. You host alumni. You host dignitaries. You know, with faculty. I've only been in the house once, I think.

Myers: A good deal of effort making that house the way it was. She had very good taste.

Miner: Did she? I met her a couple of times. But I never saw—I never saw the house when it had the things that you had it in. I was never in the house before the Wilsons. I understand it's quite—I don't know. Malleable is not the right space, but people seem to reinvent it. The current president and his wife are reinventing it as well. And it certainly is the case with our library. Our library has been through a number of changes as well in the, you know, fourteen years since it's been up. Move things round and respond to the needs of the students. So you weren't in New York very long.

Myers: About five.

Miner: Was it about five—you said that without a lot of enthusiasm.

Myers: It's just easy to remember.

Miner: Oh, okay. Just five years.

Myers: Yep. Now I can't remember how long we were at Connecticut College. But at Hobart, willima, dna smith was five years and minor lived—'89 to '03. How many years is that?

Miner: Fourteen.

Myers: Okay. So it was fourteen, five, fourteen. That was his...record.

Miner: Did you do a lot of antiquing in New York?

Myers: Yeah.

Miner: Yeah? So there were always ways to find wonderful parts of the community. Did he like being a provost?

Myers: No. He loved it.

Miner: Did he? What about it did he love?

Myers: Minor's a diplomat. He knows how to calm people over. Get the best out of people. He doesn't bellyache. You'll never hear the word crab out of him. Um. He was just a happy camper doing what he did best.

Miner: How would you describe what he did best?

Myers: Making people happy. He loved it when someone would come in with a problem and say, oh, we'll just never figure this out. We'll never be able to do it. Minor would say just dream it and it will happen.

Miner: hm. That was his approach to life then generally. Do you think that was good advice?

Myers: Yeah, I think so. What else do you want to know?

Miner: Well, maybe you can retell the story you told me over lunch. When I told you on the phone—the one conversation that I had with Minor and the first question he asked me was what do you collect? And so for years before I really even, you know, had an idea to start talking to other people, every once in a while I would think what on earth did I say to him? I'm not a collector in any way, shape, or form like you are. But I've traveled a lot and I've picked things up on my travels but I don't know that I could say that I have one way of describing what I've collected. And I've always wondered did he use that as a, I don't know, some kind of metric to understand the person he was talking to. Would it have been bad if I said I didn't collect anything?

Myers: No. Unless he was...that was an icebreaker.

Miner: Okay. Was he concerned about the answer?

Myers: Yeah.

Miner: Okay. In what way?

Myers: If you were collecting something, nothing would make you happier than to talk to somebody who cared. Um. Also, it was an icebreaker for minor 'cause it took him a little fancy footwork to sidle up to these people and start talking to them.

Miner: Which people? Anyone he would encounter or for particular purposes?

Myers: People who came to the parties, for example.

Miner: Okay. Was he good at remembering those kinds of details about people?

Myers: Mm hmm.

Miner: That's the sense I got from some people and something I'm really envious of because I don't. But, uh, so he might be at a party where he's talking to somebody and connect them with somebody else or something else down the road. What do you think about that kind of talent?

Would you describe it as a talent or do you see it in other people? Because I've certainly seen people with good social networking kinds of skills who can match people up in that way, but what kind of effect did it have on people you saw?

Myers: I never thought of it.

Miner: Okay. It was just part of it. Do you know if his family were collectors?

Myers: His family liked nice things. We have a rug in the other room. Oriental rugs. Um. What else did they collect? I don't know.

Miner: did they travel a lot?

Myers: No.

Miner: Abroad?

Myers: That's not right. They had one of those—what do you call them—Winnebago homes?

Miner: Uh huh. Sure. That's also the American dream, right? Hittin' the road and going a lot of places in the summer with the kids. You're rolling your eyes. The American dream. The American nightmare. One or the other. It was a joke, isn't it? The "Are We There Yet" factor of childrearing. Well, they certainly wouldn't have gotten an Oriental rug and a Winnebago. Or at least not gotten to the Orient to get it. So it must have been somewhere else. Hm. Did you travel a lot?

Myers: Yes.

Miner: Growing up?

Myers: Yeah.

Miner: And you said your folks went on a cruise? Or world travel in other ways?

Myers: It was a cruise. I don't know.

Miner: Where did you travel growing up?

Myers: I went to, um, France. Three times. In my summers. Um. Where else did I travel to? I traveled with my parents. We did Europe. Um. And I was along on that trip. No, I've been very lucky with opportunities.

Miner: Is that where you got your interest in French was through that early travel?

Myers: My father was French-Canadian and he spoke it at home. And he was a physician. And I would hear him talk on the telephone to some of his patients and it just seemed so foreign for lack of a better word. So.

Miner: Did he teach you when you started being interested?

Myers: No.

Miner: Did you learn from him? But it sparked a curiosity. When did you pursue it boarding school or high school or just college? So you had it planted in you and pursued it when you had an opportunity. That's great. Where did you get your artist eye? Your ability spot panache? Is that your mom, or both?

Myers: Both of them a little, but major, major, major contributions to my panache were from Minor Myers the Third.

Miner: oh, how so?

Myers: He could just see something and know it was valuable.

Miner: Interesting. At an early age?

Myers: Well, certainly—yeah. I don't know what it was like in high school.

Miner: I'm sorry. I thought you said Minor Myers the Third. You mean Minor Myers Junior.

Myers: Oh, you're right.

Miner: I was going to say, what a precocious child. So he started—it was when you were having conversations when you were talking about jobs or elsewhere on your travels. Neat. I often wonder if—because Minor was a person of the artifact and certainly the books. I love books. I wonder what he would think about all the digitized books.

Myers: I've always wondered that too.

Miner: Do you?

Myers: Because for a lot of people not long ago, saying that books were going to become a thing of the past. And Minor just never believed that.

Miner: that's right. They said that about LPs too and now it's retro and cool to own a record player. A bunch of big discs. Pay big bucks for him. Do you remember Brian Simpson?

Myers: No.

Miner: From Babbitt's Books? He owns a shop in Bloomington.

Myers: I remember Babbitt's Books. What's his name?

Miner: Brian Simpson.

Myers: Okay. Simpson threw me. Brian.

Miner: Brian. Babbitt's Books. Brian. We had a discussion about, you know, the ubiquity of books and how being able to do an Internet search threw off the book trade. Devalued books. As a collecting kind of thing because you can see—if you can see there are a hundred copies and, you know, one of them is digitized, how much do you really want to pay for one at the store? You have to be a certain kind of collector to still want to do that.

Myers: Minor had a good time at his shop.

Miner: yeah. And I understand that minor acquired a lot of things through donations for the library on campus to. I don't know if you are aware of that at all. Like, donations of books from people's estates and things. He would do appraisals for him before they would come to the library. So you guys didn't talk books a lot? They weren't a big part of your life? It was more of the visual arts.

Myers: Mm hmm.

Miner: I see you have a lot of paintings. Was that your interest or Minor's interest or both?

Myers: Both.

Miner: You want to talk about paintings for a while? What's so interesting about paintings?

Myers: Nothing is coming to my mind.

Miner: That's okay. Are you doing okay? Are you getting tired of talking?

Myers: I'm getting tired.

Miner: Well, you know what? We can stop.

Myers: All right.

Miner: We don't have to do this.

Myers: But if you need anything, call me.

Miner: I was looking at my notes and I do have one question that I've been asking everybody who knew minor as a collector.

Myers: Okay.

Miner: So the university acquired his collection from you. And people on our campus. And of course, there was so much happening at that time. And some people have said well, Minor would hate that. How could you do that? How could you not keep everything? And one of the reasons I think I told that I'm interested in this project is because so much of his—of Minor's opinions about books and libraries resonate on our campus today. People just have it so fixed in their head that we shouldn't be doing any kind of active collection weeding. And, you know, he

built you that great library is the kind of things that I hear. How could you possibly get rid of anything? So I've often wondered. One of the first things I wondered about him as a collector, did he ever get rid of anything? Did he sell anything? So he never did. So what do you think he would have thought of us auctioning his collection?

Myers: He would have been hurt.

Miner: Most of what he collected wasn't appropriate for our curriculum, you know, frankly. And some collectors are people who love the joy of collecting and redistributing for other people to have joy in, right? In collecting. And so I was always curious if he was that kind of person.

Myers: He would have been...anything that was 18th century. You walk into a shop. He sees a book that's 18th century. He grabs it and puts it where the cashier will get him before anybody else does. Um. He had a good life. He got to be where he wanted to be which was a university president. Um. He made a lot of people happy. He did a wonderful job with our two sons.

Miner: Yep.

Myers: He was cremated as well.

Miner: I did not know that.

Myers: They have a plot of land in Copley, Ohio. Which is where Minor grew up. And he's buried there with his family. So.

Miner: Ellen, thank you so much.

Myers: You're so welcome, thank you.

Miner: I appreciate it.

SECOND RECORDING TRANSCRIPT

Miner: I called Ellen Myers back at her home after our interview to ask her a few follow-up questions. Well, I was wishing that I followed up with two questions. So my follow-up questions are you mentioned a couple of times that minor wanted to be a college president.

Myers: Correct.

Miner: All his life.

Myers: Yep.

Miner: And did you want to be a college president's wife?

Myers: No, but it came along with—as I said I think this afternoon—I could have been Danish modern in terms of—I was his. Do with me what you want to do.

Miner: Yeah. I also wanted to know if he—you mentioned something to Minor about coming back to this area.

Myers: Yeah. Quote unquote, I said to him what am I going to do?

Miner: Oh dear.

Myers: And he said just go along. You'll find someone new. And this is while he is lying in his death bed. And that was a long stay.

Miner: Yeah.

Myers: Of being ill. And it did happen.

Miner: Finding someone, you mean?

Myers: Yeah.

Miner: And it sounded like when you moved back and started to lose friends that that was even more difficult. I'm so glad you found someone.

Myers: Thank you.

Miner: Yeah, it makes a big difference. Did he talk about what to do with his collections?

Myers: No. We were running around like chickens with our necks cut off. It was so much stuff that needed to be done. Not the least of which was money and how I was going to manage moneywise. I think I told you that, um, now I forgot what I was going to say.

Miner: Well, there were so many things you had to do to get ready to move I imagine is what you were going to say.

Myers: That's what I was going to say. And if you saw things in the house today or I also have, um, a lower level with three bedrooms and an upper level with one bedroom and one office. You would say how can you manage all this stuff? Well, we had to get rid of a lot of stuff. You have had the privilege of seeing his books and I daresay not all of his books. I think tons of them went to, um, the fellow who—and I'm happy for that—the fellow who appraised the collection before I left. Illinois Wesleyan left no stone unturned.

Miner: So they took part of the books and sold them elsewhere?

Myers: I, I am not the one to tell you that.

Miner: Sorry, okay. Can you tell me who is?

Myers: No, I can't. 'Cause I'm not sure. Um. It's a fellow in Chicago. And he—he came back on many days like, six, seven days and had his own code from—for how to, um, assess what was left in the house and I was not supposed to know what it was lest I stashed some of the goodies.

You have to believe that Minor had a lot of goodies in his collection of books. He could look at a book. He didn't buy everything single book he saw of the 18th century. But he bought most of them. Anyway, I wish you could find out what else happened to his collection.

Miner: Well, it's very interesting that you should put it that way, Ellen, because I was led to believe—I guess I've had a romantic idea about all of this. That he instructed you to sell things, you know, specific things.

Myers: No. No. Uh uh.

Miner: So you were not in the house then—

Myers: I was.

Miner: —when this guy came?

Myers: No. I would go over to one of my girlfriend's and hang out. This was another one of these people who bought books from minor. And I wish I could remember his name. but they could tell you in the president's office his name.

Miner: well, the only book dealer I know if in Chicago who dealt with Minor was Tom Joyce.

Myers: That's he.

Miner: So he was going there without, like, without instruction from you to go there?

Myers: I wasn't—what was important to me at the time was that I clean out all of these books. You have no idea how many books there were.

Miner: Yeah. But you think at least twice as much as the University acquired then.

Myers: I wouldn't be surprised.

Miner: Well, that's just amazing.

Myers: It is.

Miner: I have called Tom Joyce about talking but we have not set up a time yet.

Myers: He may not want to.

Miner: Well, he indicated that he would be willing so, but I have no spoken to him. I know he came down for the auction. I'm sorry?

Myers: Repeat?

Miner: I know he came down for the auctions.

Myers: Did he?

Miner: Yeah.

Myers: Well, maybe he had some ideas in his back pocket of what he wanted to win. And auction. But \$100,000 to me doesn't seem like a lot of money to pay for what Minor had in the basement.

Miner: Yeah. It is news to me that you did not disperse of some of his collection yourself.

Myers: I want to cross my heart in front of you and say I don't recall collecting money for the sale of any book.

Miner: Okay.

Myers: I think that's all I can say to you.

Miner: And I think that's sufficient. Like I said, I kind of had this, this narrative in my mind when you were talking about him telling you to come back here that he was, you know, giving you advice about things that you could take that would make for good memories or good investments or whatever reason. Um. We can leave it there, Ellen.

Myers: Excellent.

Miner: Thank you so much, Ellen, again for your time and your thoughts. I really appreciate it. Have a good evening.

Myers: Okay. Thank you.

Miner: Okay, bye.

Myers: Bye.

END TRANSCRIPT